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ORGANIZING FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

STUDY

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BY ITS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL POLICY MACHINERY
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FOREWORD

The Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery has been making a scholarly and nonpartisan study of how our Government can best organize to formulate and execute national security policy. This is the first full-scale examination of this problem since the discussion and debate preceding the passage of the National Security Act of 1947.

The most important questions facing the new President are in the area of national security. If free institutions are to survive and prosper, the Nation must have a strategy for peace which will command wide support, at home and abroad, and which will effectively marshal and use our resources and guide our efforts in the cause of peace with justice.

The National Security Council, composed of the Government's ranking officials in the fields of foreign and defense policy, was established in 1947 to advise the President "with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security." It can be of major assistance to the President in helping him devise a long-term national strategy and direct the Nation's efforts in the field of national security. The Council and its subordinate machinery have therefore been a central subject of the subcommittee's inquiries and hearings.

The subcommittee has released detailed testimony on the National Security Council given by Robert A. Lovett, James A. Perkins, Sidney W. Souers, Robert Cutler, Dillon Anderson, Adm. Arthur W. Radford, Secretary of State Herter, Secretary of Defense Gates, Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, George F. Kennan, Paul H. Nitze, Robert Bowie, and Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller. It has also secured the views of many other present and former Government officials and students of the policy process.

Earlier this year the subcommittee published "Selected Materials," a compilation of official documents and articles relating to the NSC, and also issued as a subcommittee print a study entitled "Organizational History of the National Security Council," prepared by Mr. James S. Lay, Jr. and Mr. Robert H. Johnson of the NSC staff.

This staff report is intended to make available to the incoming administration certain findings about the role of the Council in assisting the President in developing and carrying out national security policy.

HENRY M. JACKSON,
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery.

DECEMBER 12, 1960.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the second of a series of staff reports being issued by the Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery. These studies, which draw upon the large body of testimony and counsel given the subcommittee since it was established over a year ago, make suggestions for improving the national security policymaking process.

By law and practice, the President has the prime role in guarding the Nation's safety. He is responsible for the conduct of foreign relations. He commands the Armed Forces. He has the initiative in budgetmaking. He, and he alone, must finally weigh all the factors—domestic, foreign, military—which affect our position in the world and by which we seek to influence the world environment.

The National Security Council was created by statute in 1947 to assist the President in fulfilling his responsibilities. The Council is charged with advising the President—

> with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security.

The NSC was one of the answers to the frustrations met by World War II policymakers in trying to coordinate military and foreign policy. It is a descendant of such wartime groups as the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC).

The Council is not a decisionmaking body; it does not itself make policy. It serves only in an *advisory* capacity to the President, helping him arrive at decisions which he alone can make.

Although the NSC was created by statute, each successive President has great latitude in deciding how he will employ the Council to meet his particular needs. He can use the Council as little, or as much, as he wishes. He is solely responsible for determining what policy matters will be handled within the Council framework, and how they will be handled.

An important question facing the new President, therefore, is how he will use the Council to suit his own style of decision and action.

This study, drawing upon the experience of the past 13 years, places at the service of the incoming administration certain observations concerning the role of the Council in the formulation and execution of national security policy.

THE COUNCIL AND THE SYSTEM

When he takes office in January, the new President will find in being a *National Security Council* and an *NSC system.*

The Council itself is a forum where the President and his chief lieutenants can discuss and resolve problems of national security. It brings together as statutory members the President, the Vice President, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, and as statutory advisers the Director of Central Intelligence and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The President can also ask other key aides to take part in Council deliberations. The Secretary of the Treasury, for example, has attended regularly by Presidential invitation.

But there is also in being today an NSC system, which has evolved since 1947. This system consists of highly institutionalized procedures and staff arrangements, and a complex interdepartmental committee substructure. These are intended to undergird the activities of the Council. Two interagency committees—the Planning Board and the Operations Coordinating Board—comprise the major pieces of this substructure. The former prepares so-called "policy papers" for consideration by the Council; the latter is expected to help follow through on the execution of presidentially approved NSC papers.

The new President will have to decide how he wishes to use the Council and the NSC system. His approach to the first meetings of the Council under his administration will be important. These early sessions will set precedents. Action taken or not taken, assignments given or not given, invitations to attend extended or not extended, will make it subsequently easier or harder for the President to shape the Council and the system to his needs and habits of work.

He faces questions like these: What principals and advisers should be invited to attend the first Council meetings? What part should Presidential staff assistants play? What should the participants be told about the planned role and use of the NSC system? Who will prepare the agenda? What items will be placed on the agenda? Should the Council meet regularly or as need arises?

THE NEW PRESIDENT'S CHOICE

The new President has two broad choices in his approach to the National Security Council.

First: He can use the Council as an intimate forum where he joins with his chief advisers in searching discussion and debate of a limited number of critical problems involving major long-term strategic choices or demanding immediate action.

Mr. Robert Lovett has described this concept of the Council in terms of "a kind of 'Court of Domestic and Foreign Relations'":

> The National Security Council process, as originally envisaged—perhaps "dreamed of" is more accurate—contemplated the devotion of whatever number of hours were necessary in order to exhaust a subject and not just exhaust the listeners.

> * * * The purpose was to insure that the President was in possession of all the available facts, that he got firsthand a chance to evaluate an alternative course of action disclosed by the dissenting views, and that all implications in either course of action were explored before he was asked to take the heavy responsibility of the final decision.

Second: The President can look upon the Council differently. He can view it as the apex of a comprehensive and highly institutionalized system for generating policy proposals and following through on presidentially approved decisions.

Seen in this light, the Council itself sits at the top of what has been called "policy hill." Policy papers are supposed to travel through interdepartmental committees up one side of the hill. They are considered in the Council. If approved by the President, they travel down the opposite side of the hill, through other interdepartmental mechanisms, to the operating departments and agencies.

THE COUNCIL'S SPAN OF CONCERN

The voluminous record of meetings held, and papers produced, makes it clear that the Council and its subordinate machinery are now very busy and active. A long list of questions always awaits entry on the NSC agenda.

Presidential orders now in force provide that all decisions on national security policy, except for special emergencies, will be made within the Council framework. In theory, the embrace of the NSC over such matters is total.

Yet many of the most critical questions affecting national security are not really handled within the NSC framework.

The main work of the NSC has centered largely around the consideration of *foreign policy* questions, rather than *national security* problems in their full contemporary sense. A high proportion of the Council's time has been devoted to the production and study of so-called "country papers"—statements of our national position toward this or that foreign nation.

The Council, indeed, appears to be only marginally involved in helping resolve many of the most important problems which affect the future course of national security policy. For example, the Council seems to have only a peripheral or *pro forma* concern with such matters as the key decisions on the size and composition of the total national security budget, the strength and makeup of the armed services, the scale and scope of many major agency programs in such fields as foreign economic policy and atomic energy, the translation of policy goals into concrete plans and programs through the budgetary process, and many critical operational decisions with great long-term policy consequences.

The fact is that the departments and agencies often work actively and successfully to keep critical policy issues outside the NSC system. When policy stakes are high and departmental differences deep, agency heads are loath to submit problems to the scrutiny of coordinating committees or councils. They aim in such cases to bypass the committees while keeping them occupied with less important matters. They try to settle important questions in dispute through "out

of court" informal interagency negotiations, when they are doubtful of the President's position. Or else they try "end runs" to the President himself when they think this might be advantageous.

Despite the vigorous activity of the NSC system, it is not at all clear that the system now concerns itself with many of the most important questions determining our long-term national strategy or with many of the critical operational decisions which have fateful and enduring impact on future policy.

THE PLANNING BOARD

As the NSC system operates today, most of the matters which appear on the Council agenda are the product of a highly formalized and complex "policy paper production" system. The heart of this system is the NSC Planning Board, an interagency committee whose membership parallels that of the Council at the Assistant Secretary level. The initial drafts of policy papers are normally written by the departments and agencies, acting individually or in concert. But the Planning Board is responsible for the final content and language of most papers which reach the Council table. As Governor Rockefeller told the subcommittee:

> I think the public does not recognize the degree to which the Planning Board really does 95 percent of the work, and it is not very often that a paper is changed by the Security Council.

The Planning Board is an interdepartmental committee, chaired by the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. Although formally appointed by the President, who has admonished them to act in their individual capacities in seeking "statesmanlike" solutions, the departmental members are oriented to the problems and perspectives of their own agencies. They can be expected to try to guard departmental interests.

From the outset, the drafting of a Planning Board paper is an involved process of negotiation, barter, offer, and counteroffer among the many departments involved. Governor Rockefeller has described the Planning Board process in these words:

> A major question is presented to the Planning Board and the various parties at interest, namely, the departments, each with its own role in relation to the area under discussion, work pretty carefully with highly skilled representatives to get language into the position paper which, while it does not violate the objective, protects their own position and their own special—I don't say interest—responsibility in this field. * * * So you get a watered-down version before it comes to the NSC and * * * permissive language which is not too obvious in the phraseology. This is quite an art, this business.

Many papers going from the Planning Board to the Council do indeed contain "splits"—statements of different departmental viewpoints.

But it is not at all clear that the "splits" actually help the Council understand the real policy alternatives and the true policy options available on some issue under debate. They may crystallize minor

points of difference between competing agency views. The alternatives the "splits" normally reflect, in any case, represent differences in departmental or agency viewpoint. Such differences do not necessarily define or illuminate the real policy choices available. Moreover, "splits" are themselves a product of interagency bargaining. Their phrasing is adjusted to what the traffic can bear and shaped in the interest of winning allies for particular points of view.

Furthermore, the Planning Board papers are not "costed" except in the most general way. The budgetary consequences of proposed courses of action are set forth only in order of magnitude terms. As a result, Council members are little assisted in weighing the benefits of alternative policy courses against the costs.

Finally, the Planning Board, by its very nature, is not a creative instrument for developing and bringing forward imaginative and sharply defined choices, particularly in uncharted areas of policy. Interagency committees of this kind have a built-in drive toward lowest common denominator solutions. They can comment, review, and adjust. But they are not good instruments of innovation.

The limitation of the Planning Board itself in developing new responses to new problems is in part demonstrated by the employment for this purpose of outside consultants and "distinguished citizens committees," such as the Killian and Gaither Committees on defense and the Draper Committee on military and economic assistance.

The main source of policy innovations is the contribution of an individual. He may be found outside, or anywhere within, the Government. But normally he will be found working in a department or agency, grappling day in and day out with some pressing national security problem.

Given imaginative proposals from such individuals, interagency committees like the Planning Board can be helpful in criticizing and commenting. But if, in the interest of "agreed solutions," such committees blur the edges and destroy the coherence of these proposals, they do the President a disservice. There is strong reason to believe this is now the case.

THE COUNCIL ITSELF

The National Security Council now holds regular weekly meetings. The meetings vary in size. Sometimes the President meets with only a handful of principals in conducting important business. On other occasions, 30 or 40 people may attend. A typical session, however, may have two dozen people present. Some 15 people may sit at the Council table, with perhaps another 10 looking on as observers and aides.

Mr. James Perkins has made this comment on the size of Council meetings:

> * * * I think that the more one uses the NSC as a system of interagency coordination and the legitimatizing of decisions already arrived at, the growth in numbers is inevitable, because people left out of it and not at the meetings whose concurrence is required have a prima facie case for attending.

But if one views the Council primarily as a Presidential advisory body, the point quickly comes when the sheer numbers of participants

and observers at a meeting limits the depth and dilutes the quality of the discussion. The present size of most Council meetings appears to have reached and passed this point.

There are different kinds of Council meetings. Some are briefing sessions designed to acquaint the participants with, for example, an important advance in weapons technology. Other meetings center around so-called "discussion papers," which aim not at proposing a solution to some policy problem but at clarifying its nature and outlining possible alternative courses of action.

The more typical Council session, however, follows a precise agenda and focuses upon the consideration of Planning Board policy papers. These papers have a routine format. As Robert Cutler has described them:

> For convenience, a routine format for policy statements was developed. Thus, the busy reader would always know where to find the covering letter, the general considerations, the objectives, the courses of action to carry out the objectives, the financial appendixes, the supporting staff study; for they invariably appeared in this sequence in the final document.
>
> * * * The standardization of these techniques made it possible for the Council to transact, week in and week out, an enormously heavy load of work.

The main work of the Council, thus, now consists of discussion and a search for consensus, centering around Planning Board papers.

The normal end product of Council discussion is a presidentially approved paper setting forth the recommendations of the Planning Board paper, with such amendments, if any, as are adopted after Council deliberations. This paper is transmitted through the Operations Coordinating Board to the operating departments and agencies.

But one point is fundamental: Policy *papers* and actual *policy* are not necessarily the same.

Pieces of paper are important only as steps in a process leading to action—as minutes of decisions to do or not do certain things.

Papers which do not affect the course of governmental action are not policy: they are mere statements of aspiration. NSC papers are policy only if they result in *action*. They are policy only if they cause the Government to adopt one course of conduct and to reject another, with one group of advocates "winning" and the other "losing."

It appears that many of the papers now emerging from the Council do not meet the test of policy in this sense.

THE OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD

The job of helping follow through on policies emerging from the Council and approved by the President is entrusted to the Council's Operations Coordinating Board. In terms of the NSC system, the OCB is to policy followup what the Planning Board is to policy development. It is an interdepartmental committee on the Under Secretary level, chaired, like the Planning Board, by the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

The OCB, assisted by an elaborate system of interagency working groups, prepares plans for carrying out the intent of NSC policies, transmits them to the departments and agencies, secures information on the status of programs underway, and reports back through the NSC to the President on progress.

In theory, the OCB does not *make* policy. Its mandate extends only to helping *carry out* policy. But this limitation is not and cannot be observed in practice.

When it receives an NSC policy paper, the initial job of the OCB is to determine the real meaning of the document in hand. It must often translate general statements, susceptible of varying interpretations, into tangible objectives together with plans for achieving them.

Departmental aims and interests are at stake in this determination. The process of translating an NSC paper into an action-oriented program therefore involves the same kind of interagency bartering and negotiating which takes place earlier in the Planning Board.

The OCB is an interagency committee which lacks command authority. It can advise, but not direct, the operating agencies.

Many of the most important decisions affecting the course of programs under OCB surveillance are made outside the framework of the Board. Programmatic budgetary decisions are a notable example. Also, the departments often bypass the OCB, pursuing their own interpretations of policy or engaging in "bootleg" coordination through extramural means.

The formal machinery of the OCB includes a large number of working groups which turn out detailed followup studies and papers. The significance of much of this work has been strongly questioned. Secretary of State Herter made this comment before the subcommittee:

> I was Chairman of OCB for 2 years. The feeling of utility varied an awful lot. At times you felt that you were being very useful. At other times you felt you were fanning the air or spending a lot of time reviewing minutiae. * * * When you get into the formal sessions, you again apply yourself to paperwork. Sometimes you get yourself so bogged down in the editing of a word or a sentence that you say, "My God, why am I spending so much time on this?"

The nature of the danger seems clear. Actually, the OCB has little impact on the real coordination of policy execution. Yet, at the same time, the existence of this elaborate machinery creates a false sense of security by inviting the conclusion that the problem of teamwork in the execution of policy is well in hand.

Recently, the Board has abandoned or relaxed many of the rigid reporting requirements which governed its work when it was established, and has focused its attention upon a smaller number of important problems rather than spreading its efforts across the board. These steps have reportedly been helpful.

But there is a more fundamental question at issue: Can an interdepartmental committee, like the OCB, be counted on to discharge effectively major responsibilities for followthrough? The evidence points to the contrary.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Two main conclusions about the National Security Council emerge:

First: The real worth of the Council to a President lies in being an accustomed forum where he and a small number of his top advisers can gain that intellectual intimacy and mutual understanding on which true coordination depends. Viewed thus, the Council is a place where the President can receive from his department and agency heads a full exposition of policy alternatives available to him, and, in turn, give them clear-cut guidance for action.

Second: The effectiveness of the Council in this primary role has been diminished by the working of the NSC system. The root causes of difficulty are found in overly crowded agenda, overly elaborate and stylized procedures, excessive reliance on subordinate interdepartmental mechanisms, and the use of the NSC system for comprehensive coordinating and followthrough responsibilities it is ill suited to discharge.

The philosophy of the suggestions which follow can be summed up in this way—to "deinstitutionalize" and to "humanize" the NSC process.

The President's instrument

The Council exists only to serve the President. It should meet when he wishes advice on some matter, or when his chief foreign and defense policy advisers require Presidential guidance on an issue which cannot be resolved without his intervention.

There are disadvantages in regularly scheduled meetings. The necessity of having to present and to discuss something at such meetings may generate business not really demanding Presidential consideration. Council meetings and the Council agenda should never become ritualistic.

The purpose of Council discussion

The true goal of "completed staff work" is not to spare the President the necessity of choice. It is to make his choices more meaningful by defining the essential issues which he alone must decide and by sharpening the precise positions on the opposing sides.

Meetings of the Council should be regarded as vehicles for clarifying differences of view on major policy departures or new courses of action advocated by department heads or contemplated by the President himself.

The aim of the discussion should be a full airing of divergent views, so that all implications of possible courses of action stand out in bold relief. Even a major issue may not belong on the Council agenda if not yet ripe for sharp and informed discussion.

Attendance at Council meetings

The Secretaries of State and Defense share the main responsibility of advising the President on national security problems. They are the key members of the Council. Whom the President invites to Council sessions will, of course, depend on the issue under discussion. However, mere "need to know," or marginal involvement with the matter at hand, should not justify attendance.

Council meetings should be kept small. When the President turns for advice to his top foreign policy and defense officials, he is concerned with what *they themselves* think.

The meetings should, therefore, be considered gatherings of principals, not staff aides. Staff attendance should be tightly controlled.

As a corollary to the strict limitation of attendance, a written record of decisions should be maintained and given necessary distribution.

The Planning Board

The NSC Planning Board now tends to overshadow in importance, though not in prestige, the Council itself. However, some group akin to the present Board, playing a rather different role than it now does, can be of continuing help to the Council in the future.

Such a Board would be used mainly to criticize and comment upon policy initiatives developed by the departments or stimulated by the President. It would not be used as an instrument for negotiating "agreed positions" and securing departmental concurrences.

More reliance could also be placed on informal working groups. They could be profitably employed both to prepare matters for Council discussion and to study problems which the Council decides need further examination. The make-up and life of these groups would depend on the problem involved.

So, too, intermittent outside consultants or "distinguished citizens committees," such as the Gaither Committee, could on occasion be highly useful in introducing fresh perspectives on critical problems.

The role of the Secretary of State

The Secretary of State is crucial to the successful operation of the Council. Other officials, particularly the Secretary of Defense, play important parts. But the President must rely mainly upon the Secretary of State for the initial synthesis of the political, military, economic, and other elements which go into the making of a coherent national strategy. He must also be mainly responsible for bringing to the President proposals for major new departures in national policy.

To do his job properly the Secretary must draw upon the resources of a Department of State staffed broadly and competently enough with generalists, economists, and military and scientific experts to assist him in all areas falling within his full concern. He and the President need unhurried opportunities to consider the basic directions of American policy.

The Operations Coordinating Board

The case for abolishing the OCB is strong. An interdepartmental committee like the OCB has inherent limitations as an instrument for assisting with the problem of policy followthrough. If formal interagency machinery is subsequently found to be needed, it can be established later.

Responsibility for implementation of policies cutting across departmental lines should, wherever possible, be assigned to a particular department or to a particular action officer, possibly assisted by an informal interdepartmental group.

In addition, the President must continue to rely heavily on the budgetary process, and on his own personal assistants in performance auditing.

Problems of staff

The President should at all times have the help and protection of a small personal staff whose members work "outside the system," who are sensitive to the President's own information needs, and who can assist him in asking relevant questions of his departmental chiefs, in making suggestions for policy initiatives not emerging from the operating departments and agencies, and in spotting gaps in policy execution.

The Council will continue to require a staff of its own, including a key official in charge. This staff should consist of a limited number of highly able aides who can help prepare the work of the Council, record its decisions, and troubleshoot on spot assignments.

The NSC system now contains several staff components. These might well be more closely integrated. Also, various special project staffs on foreign policy matters have been established in recent years at the White House. Consideration could be given to bringing them within the NSC framework.

A special problem

The National Security Act intended that one Council member regularly bring to the NSC perspectives on our domestic economy and domestic resources.

The Director of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization is the present heir of that role. But the concern of the OCDM focuses upon civil defense and mobilization problems of wartime emergencies. The Council of Economic Advisers, among other agencies, is now much more concerned than the OCDM with the kind of domestic perspectives relevant to the problems of a protracted conflict which stops short of major war.

The new President and the Congress may therefore wish to ask whether the Director of OCDM should have continued statutory membership on the Council.

The NSC and the budgetary process

Today, there is often little resemblance between a policy statement emerging from the NSC and programs finally carried out by the operating departments and agencies. The actual scale and scope of these programs is determined largely by budgetary decisions made outside the Council.

An attempt to use the Council for the details of resource allocation would be no more feasible than trying to use the Cabinet for this purpose. Yet the search for ways and means of relating the Council's advice more closely to the budget process must be pursued.

The problem is not to make the Council manager or czar of budget preparation. Rather it is to insure that the perspectives of the Secretaries of State and Defense are brought to bear on an ordering of national priorities at the target-setting stage of the annual budget preparation.

The National Security Council is the appropriate body for helping the President define such priorities.

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